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Framing Identity: Repudiating the Ideal in Chicana Literature

By

Michael A Flores

THESIS

Submitted to  
Northern Michigan University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of

Master of Arts

Graduate Studies Office

2014

## SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

Title of Thesis: Framing Identity: Repudiating the Ideal in Chicana Literature

This thesis by Michael A Flores is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the Department of English and by the Assistant Provost of Graduate Education and Research.

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## ABSTRACT

### Framing Identity: Repudiating the Ideal in Chicana Literature

By

Michael A Flores

In the 1960s Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez penned his now canonical, epic poem “I Am Joaquin.” It chronicled the historic oppression of a transnational, Mexican people as well as revolutionary acts of their forefathers in resisting tyranny. Coinciding with a series of renewed, sociopolitical campaigns, collectively known as the Chicano Movement, Gonzales’ poem used vivid imagery to present an idealized representation of Chicanos and encouraged his reader to engage in revolutionary action. Though the poem encouraged strong leadership, upward mobility, and political engagement the representations of women in his text were misogynistic and limiting.

His presentation of the “black-shawled Faithful women” and “woman, sheltered beneath her shawl of black... Her rosary she prays and fingers endlessly” represent a culturally idealized framing of womanhood which drew heavily from traditional religious and cultural archetypes (Gonzalez 111-273). Chicanas, having a history of revolutionary action, recognized the contradictions of a movement that was fighting for civil rights and true justice, yet subordinated women. The representations of women in Chicana literature in the decades following the Chicano Movement, in works such as Sandra Cisneros “Woman Hollering Creek” and Cherríe Moraga’s poem “Loving on the Run,” sought to reject molds, revitalize myth, & create space for fluid movement through gender boundaries and sexual orientation.

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2014

## DEDICATION

*I dedicate this work to the strong women throughout my life. My wife, who was amazingly patient, even as I worked on this project on our anniversary; My mother for telling me stories and encouraging me to “keep on,” despite knowing little about the demands of college; and both my Grandmothers, for not taking shit from anyone.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If I was to acknowledge all the people who helped me get to where I am now, I'd have a laundry list of educators, counselors, clergy, friends, and family. There are some, however, that are more than deserving of immediate recognition. During the economic downturn of the mid-2000s my father was generous in allowing me to start college. He took care to pay the bills and rent and allowed me to focus my efforts on school. As a non-traditional student with painfully, little knowledge of the expectations of collegiate life, I must admit that my father was taking a gamble.

Both my father and mother had a few semesters worth of college credit at East LA College, but did not get far in their academic pursuits. Being raised in East Los Angeles during the tumultuous 60s and 70s they had a dysfunctional relationship with education; something that unintentionally passed on to their children. Though my mother and father did not get very far in their own studies, they knew, at least conceptually, that education would benefit their children and were willing to provide both emotional and financial support. For that I thank them.

My first few years in college were challenging. Allocating time for studying and figuring out an "Ed plan" were a few things I had to learn by trial and error, but I'm thankful I had a few responsive faculty members who helped me along the way. I'd like to thank several faculty members at Long Beach City College for their patience,

inspiration, and insight. Without them I would not be in the position I'm in today. Many thanks to Dr. John Smith, Lee Douglas, Carlos Ramos, and many more.

I'd also like to thank a very important person a bit closer to "home." Though I am not originally from the UP I've lived here long enough to consider it home. I met my wonderful wife here and am thankful that I now have a wonderful Yooper family. My wife has been amazingly patient as I finished this project. She's spent more than a few hours at home or at my office as I clacked away on my keyboard researching, writing, and revising.

I mustn't forget about the remarkable faculty and staff at NMU. I'd like to think the years spent at NMU were like a refining process. Though I certainly have much more to learn, I feel as though I've matured as a student, professional, and person. None of which would be possible were it not for the faculty and staff at NMU. I'd like to thank Darlene Buck at Student Support Services; Shirley Brozzo from the Multi-Cultural Education Resource Center; Dr. Judy Puncochar and Dr. Joe Lubig at the School of Education. Each of these people provided opportunities and encouragement during my time at NMU.

Finally, I must thank a host of faculty in NMU's English Department for providing academic support, listening ears, professional opportunities, and constructive direction. Among the amazing faculty are Drs. Elizabeth Monske, Ray Ventre, and Lesley Larkin, along with professors Laura Soldner and Jennifer Howard. Each of these faculty members, in their own way, helped shape who I've become. I will always be indebted to them.



One faculty member in particular deserves a special thank you. My McNair faculty mentor and thesis director Dr. Amy Hamilton helped me in many ways. Along with being a great academic resource and providing a wealth of insight about academia, she helped me appreciate the culture, tradition, and history of the U.S. Southwest region—my home. Furthermore, she introduced me to life changing works of literature and ideas from which to build on. I’ve learned to work out my own issues of identity, space, and place by utilizing some of the ideas she first introduced to me. I now realize that I don’t have to fit neatly into binary, social constructs: politically right or left: *pocho* or *Mexicano*: patriot or foreign: and many more. I’ve learned that I can be transnational, endure contradiction, and occupy a “third space.” Thank you Dr. Hamilton for providing much needed direction and introducing me to life “*sin fronteras*.”

This thesis uses the guidelines provided by the MLA Style Manual and the Department of English.

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## INTRODUCTION

When I was young, I learned about Washington. I also learned about iconic American figures like Paul Revere, John Hancock, Benjamin Franklin, and honest Abraham Lincoln. I was told that these were all good men who fought for freedom. I also learned that I lived in the greatest country on earth and was told, with a little hard work, I could be anything I wanted when I grew up. This narrative was repeated so often I easily accepted it a truth. It's as though I heard it so many times I didn't question.

Some defend this narrative furiously while others just accept it and move on. I was of the latter. Throughout my primary and secondary school years I was slightly aware of obvious inequalities between where I lived and the more affluent areas of the city. I knew of the perceptions that were attached to where I other members of my family lived, but never considered how these could disrupt the neatly packaged narrative I had internalized. We popped fireworks every Fourth of July and barbequed like everyone else. I never questioned the "how" and "where" I fit into this narrative; I didn't realize that there were a host of other, more historically obscure, men and women that fought for freedom as well, and that there were problems with the national narrative that was spoon fed to me my entire life. Furthermore, I didn't know there was a history of racial and cultural conflict I was born into, or how that conflict still exists in the form of immigration, welfare, and education legislation.

When I was young I was protected—insulated—from negative racial perceptions and overt racism. The communities I grew up in and frequented in California were primarily Mexican-American and offered a cultural buffer to the outside world. The

sights, smells, and linguistic characteristics such as code switching, cadences, and Chicano/a slang were all familiar. As I grew, especially during my high school years, I retreated into culture (at least what I then thought was culture) and became complacent in my understanding of the world. The obvious inequalities between racial groups I simply wrote it off as “just the way it is.” Albeit, much of my understanding was grossly oversimplified and stereotypical.

In the mid-2000s, when I enrolled at Long Beach City College I was unprepared for the rigor and demands of functioning in a collegiate environment. My relationship with education had been very poor prior to college. The chaos of home life and in my neighborhood placed education low on my priorities. I had to recreate and train myself to be a student and critical thinker. It was the first time I was ever interested in studying and succeeding in school; it is as though blinders had been lifted off my eyes. For me, education was truly transformative. At LBCC I was still able to retreat into culture and family when life got tough. I was encouraged to transfer and complete a bachelor’s degree; I would soon be accepted to Northern Michigan University. I knew very little about NMU and had applied after I was handed a flyer during a transfer fair. I knew I wanted a “change of scenery,” but didn’t realize just how big the change would be.

I found myself in a foreign environment, only this time there wasn’t the insulation of family and community to withdraw to. As a new, non-traditional, student of color at a PWI (predominantly white institution) there is no describing the amount of isolation I felt at the beginning. The “cadence” and words I used were quickly identified as “different.” I realized many of my life experiences drastically varied from my peers; at times they were embarrassing or a hassle to explain. In time, I learned to keep that aspect of my life

reserved for close friends and confidants. Eventually, I met some great professors and found some amazing friends. However, in doing so I took on a different identity. I quickly absorbed the attributes of UP culture and did my best to assimilate.

Though successful to an extent, I always felt as though I was hiding a dirty secret. Try as I might, it was often embarrassing to share that I grew up eating different food (the appropriated taco and burrito notwithstanding), listening to different music, and using a different type of English. I felt as though to reveal this would make me even more “foreign” to my peers, many of who, mistakenly yet not maliciously, already understood Mexican-American culture to be outside of “American” cultural norms.

When I stepped into my Southwest Border Literature class for the first time I didn’t know what to expect. We began to read works of literature by Native American and Chicano/a writers, many of which I had never heard of. We talked openly about historical conflicts, migrations, cultural icons, and borderlands. I finally felt like I could talk openly without fear or judgment. Once again, it was like blinders were being lifted from my eyes. I was able to connect on many levels with the authors we read. That class also helped me come to terms with my fractured sense of identity.

For me, that class opened up a flood gate of questions. I wanted more than ever to learn about the circumstances that shaped me. This project helped me piece together the tumultuous history of the Southwest and its people. In the historical archives, I was able to see my father and mother pushed into automotive and clerical training in high school; a matter of policy that helped keep a constant stream of blue collar workers. I saw my grandmother as she labored in Los Angeles’ garment industry; a steady stream of impoverished wage earners. And, I finally understood that my parent’s dysfunctional

relationship with education stemmed from institutional policy, negative reinforcement, and low standards of education reserved for people of color, and not merely a lack of wherewithal.

The first section of this project consist of a historical overview of the peopling of the Southwest. It touches on the northern migrations of Spanish colonist and Indigenous subordinates. In addition, it looks at the emergence of a “Mexican” identity and the geopolitical circumstances surrounding U.S. acquisition of the Southwest. Moving on, it presents the racial conflicts that emerged as a result of U.S. conquest and expansion. Weaved into this section is an account of Mexican and Mexican-American resistance to subjugation and land appropriation leading up to the civil rights era.

Following an historical overview this project moves on to a key figure in the Chicano/a movement, activist and author of the epic poem “I Am Joaquin,” Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales. An explication of his epic poems reveals a revolutionary exhortation and idealizing of iconic men in Mexican history. Although, his piece helped create a sense of shared identity and solidarity between Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, it relied heavily on misogynistic representation of women.

In a rebuttal to Gonzales’ representation, this project archives the revolutionary contributions of Mexican and Mexican-American women; contributions often ignored in the broader culture. In addition, this project also outlines some of the ways Chicanas resisted gender roles, subordinate status, and being ignored within the Chicano movement. An outline of the needs and strategies of Chicana feminist is presented. Finally, this project analyzes the works of two Chicana authors, Sandra Cisneros and Cherrie Moraga. In their work one sees how they give women a voice, create strong,

autonomous characters, and create a space for confronting and moving fluidly through cultural, heteronormative, gender roles.

## **The Emergence of a People: Identity, Conflict, and Resistance**

In 1969 a large group of students and activists convened in Denver, Colorado for the first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference. The conference organizers had planned for several hundred attendees, but the conference quickly grew to over a thousand. During the conference a young poet, Alberto Urista, stood up to share a recently penned poem. The lines “In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage, but also of the brutal “Gringo” invasion of our territories... / We are free and sovereign” capture the spirit of the Chicano Movement. Not only did the Chicano Movement bring about a new consciousness and group solidarity, it was the inspiration for artistic expression through literature. Much of the literature from this era draws from the complex history of the Mexican <sup>1</sup>people.

The history of the Mexican people is multi-national, multi-ethnic and is colored by migrations and mixed allegiances. It is a history that is far from unilateral. Both the people of Mexico and Mexican-Americans share in this history. Historically, the Mexican-American population, to some extent, has always held to this shared history by continuing in traditions that predate their absorption into the U.S. Though Mexican-Americans have been citizens of the United States for over one-hundred and fifty years and have even engrafted many aspects of the dominant Anglo culture into their daily lives, they often have not been looked favorably.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Mexican,” “Mexican-American,” and “Chicano” are used throughout this piece. While “Mexican” is often used when discussing shared history and culture of both Mexican Nationals and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, the term “Mexican-American” references U.S. citizens of Mexican, ethnic origin exclusively. In this piece, the term “Chicano,” is often used interchangeably with “Mexican-American,” however, because of political connotations and popularity during the Chicano Movement, the term is typically used in reference to people or groups within the Chicano Movement.



From the earliest accounts, Mexican people have often been characterized in a negative manner by U.S. Anglos. Prior to the annexation of Texas, Mexicans were looked at as inferior and incapable of self-governance. As the U.S. expanded westward into the Southwest, new stereotypes such as lazy and criminals were attached to the Mexican-American population. Even as Mexican-Americans gained national attention in their struggle for civil rights and fair treatment they were looked upon negatively. A study on “the socioeconomic position of Mexican Americans” initiated in 1963 by the University of California, Los Angeles found that “...a strong peasant with a sweet disposition and the mind of a child” was one of several stereotypes that was attached to the Mexican-American population during the twentieth century (Grebler, Moore, Guzman 7).

Today, in this early part of the twenty-first century, many images come to mind when one thinks of Mexican-Americans. Successful actors or entertainers such as Edward James Olmos, Danny Trejo, and the musically acclaimed Selena or Carlos Santana are among Mexican-Americans of notoriety. Colorful images of food, dances, and attire are often evoked as well as quaint, ethnic enclaves that house both long time Mexican-American residents and the more recently immigrated. Though Mexican-Americans are certainly enjoying much more recognition and acclaim in comparison to decades past, negative stereotypes persist. Stereotypes of the narcotic trafficker, the gang bangers, the domestic laborer, and the over-sexualized Latina have replaced many of the clichéd caricatures. Even as both positive and negative portrayals compete, Mexican-Americans are still underrepresented in many history books. As a result of perceptual distortions an accurate understanding of this mischaracterized population is rarely seen.

Within the Anglo dominated culture of the U.S. little consideration and attention has been given to this segment of the population. Though Mexican-Americans makes up the largest number of Hispanics in the nation, social stigmas, economic trends, and minimal political participation make them of little concern to policy makers, the media, and regional governments. The common misconceptions are that the struggles of the Mexican-American are isolated, regional, and that cultural factors influenced their lack of upward mobility. In the 1960s and 70s the literature of the Chicano Movement helped historicize and combat some of these misconceptions.

The false and mischaracterizing narratives that helped establish these notions are a result of years of cultural conflict and competition for resources between dominate Anglo settlers into the U.S. Southwest and the Mexican people (both Mexican Nationals and Mexican-Americans). Often, the narratives which helped concretize the portrayal of Mexican-Americans were false, conflicting, or decontextualized such as Mexicans being an innately dirty population, yet at the same time an immoral people because of their constant mixed gender bathing; or a quaint, docile population who were at the same time roving bandits (Willis). For decades after U.S. expansion into the Southwest, these simplistic stereotypes took root in the Anglo dominated national narrative, resulting in an increase of conflict within the region.

The relationship between Mexican-American communities in the Southwest to the Euro-American U.S. culture has historically been one wrought of turmoil. UCLA professor Juan Gómez-Quíñones in his book *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* states that “In the United States Southwest, the territory and the community are the economic, social, and institutional legacy of war” (14). This statement elucidates

on the tumultuous foundation from which the years of conflict in this region were built. Indeed, the story of the Southwest is not a story exclusive to the Mexican-American population. Moreover, the region “has a history that goes back approximately 12,000 years” (Fernandez 9). Indigenous cultures ranged from early hunter-gatherer civilization, to highly complex agricultural and urban settlements (ibid). Prior to European contact, the Southwest region had seen its share of migrations. Though some Indigenous societies were sedentary and remained within their ancestral settlements for many generations, others were nomadic or relocated and settled in other areas. (Fernandez 11-14). Though some of the Indigenous peoples of the Southwest share linguistic characteristics with the Indigenous peoples of Mexico’s central valley and maintained pre-contact trade routes, prior to Spanish, colonial expansion they were largely cut off by geographical barriers to the Indigenous people of central Mexico.

To understand the settling of the Mexican population in the U.S. Southwest, one must consider the events of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Spain first arrived on the shores of modern day Mexico in 1519 following their initial contact in the Caribbean. Under the pretext of land and resource acquisition and intent on expanding Spain’s empire the conquistador Hernán Cortez with a contingent of men, both Spanish and Indigenous, moved inland. The controlling power in Mexico’s central valley were the “Mexica-Tenochca” (often erroneously referred to as the “Aztecs”) (Gómez-Quíñones 2). The Mexica’s emerging empire consisted of “a loose confederation of city-states aligning themselves voluntarily or by force” (7). Their empire also had established law, governing property rights, social status, and business transactions, as well as political councils, and “religious and educational structure,” which held each citizen to a “strict moral code” found in their

religious texts (codices). Located in modern day Mexico City, the Mexica empire was the first of many kingdoms to succumb to Spanish military conquest, domination, and colonization; it is also the historical center and folkloric beginning of the Mexican people.

Spanish colonists quickly moved west and north from the Mexica lands into contemporary Mexico's northern territory prior to reaching the area of the U.S. Southwest. A Spanish military conquest, with soldiers consisting of conquered Indigenous groups as well as Mestizos (A Spanish and Indigenous mix) and mulattoes (an archaic term for one of Spanish and African ancestry), pushed their way into "Tarascan" territory and on into the "Gran Chichimeca" (modern day Mexico's northern territory) fighting against local Indigenous groups such as the "Aacatecos, Guachichiles, Cascanes, and Chichimecs" (Gómez-Quíñones 18-19). In subduing Indigenous resistance to expansion and colonization, the Spanish disrupted whole societies and displaced many individuals. The people they conquered often became soldiers for the next expedition or were moved to work in the new silver mines or under land administrators (21). As the Spanish conquest continued, the Spanish pushed their way into what is now the U.S. Southwest. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century their expeditions took them as far as north as Santa Fe, New Mexico. In the decades following New Spain's empire moved into other areas of the Southwest, branching from New Mexico and moving east into Texas and west into California as well as surrounding states. Settlers from central Mexico moved into the region. The process of resettling the Southwest continued for centuries. The settlers usually,

migrat[ed] in family unit[s]...[and] were predominantly mestizos, a mixture of Indian and Spanish blood. [But also] mulattoes [mixed African ancestry] and a few Europeans—some born in Spain others in Mexico—as well as Hispanicized Indians from the interior of Mexico, and later Indians from the north...[modern day Mexico’s northern territory] (Gómez-Quíñones 15).

The reception of New Spain settlers into the U.S. Southwest region by Native American groups was mixed, with times of both peace and conflict (ibid). Moreover, Spanish settlement of the Southwest also brought the stratification of classes and an uneasiness between Indigenous, Mexican (mestizo), and Spanish populations.

In an attempt to protect New Spain’s northern border, the Spanish began to establish territorial outposts in California, New Mexico, and Texas, though they remained “largely isolated and separated from each other” (Fernandez 13). These early colonial outpost created geographical, political, and cultural epicenters for the Mexican population. Moreover, many factors contributed to the emergence of the Mexican population. Wars, migrations, and an insatiable demand for goods on the European stage brought African labor to the western hemisphere, and miscegenation between European, Indigenous, and those of African descent (both of Spanish nationality and forced labor originating from the continent of Africa) followed.

Religious conversion of Indigenous populations contributed to loosely shared cultural homogeneity, with many Indigenous groups replacing their female “ancient power dieties—Coatlicue (earth) and Tonantzin (fertility)” with the chaste, maternal Virgin de Guadalupe (Gómez-Quíñones 5). Correspondingly, some Indigenous people and groups in the Southwest were absorbed into the missions of New-Spain, which

served as “ideological, labor, and administrative institution[s]” converting and acculturating, while others Indigenous groups lived autonomously, refusing to recognize Spanish authority of the “jointly occupied” region. Though short lived, these missions, primarily in California and Texas, along with colonial outpost called pueblos and haciendas further south, were one of several ways the Spanish instituted control of the region (20). Thus, the Mexican-American heritage is “the historical result of a process that began centuries ago and continues today” (13).

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a self-styled homogeneity, often with some regional variation, of the Mexican people emerged in regions of New Spain’s northern territory. As a result of geographical isolation from Mexico City, Mexico’s cultural and political center, political unease and calls for autonomy began to characterize the Southwest territory, especially in places like New Mexico and Texas. At the same time external, national encroachment by the U.S., as well as internal conflicts threatened Spain’s foothold in New Spain’s northern territory (what would now be considered the U.S. Southwest as well as Northern Mexico).

As the first few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century played out, power struggles and a desire for autonomy from Spain permeated from Mexico’s central valley to the outer reaches of colonial territory: the U.S. border region. At the same time, emboldened Anglo settlers, began encroaching upon New Spain’s outer territory (14). Not long after Mexico established its independence, in 1821, the U.S. Southwest territory was “[w]rested away” from a fledgling Mexican government in the U.S. war with Mexico in 1848. Though this historical overview hardly captures the climate and smaller conflicts that led up to the

war, as with any transference of power, it was not without its conflict, negotiations, and alternating violence.

The Mexican-American population, much like their Indigenous ancestors and other Indigenous groups throughout the continental U.S., suffered comparably from Anglo expansionism. Author, Raul Fernandez, in his book *The Mexican-American Border Region: Issues and Trends* argues:

In the newly acquired southwestern frontier, the Anglo settlers frequently treated the Hispanic population much like it dealt with the native Indian population: as people without rights that were merely obstacles to the acquisition and exploitation to the natural resources and land. Thus it was not merely through litigation but often through outright force...that the conquered population was dispossessed. In California Mexicans and other Hispanics were driven off the gold mine fields by force including beatings, killings, lynchings, and the imposition of “foreign miner” taxes. (Fernandez 22).

This account reveals that land displacement and economic suppression by means of the use of force was a common practice in the newly acquired U.S. Southwest. Mexican-Americans, now citizens of the U.S. were not looked upon as equals in the larger national context. These precedents did not go away with time. Furthermore, they became the foundational themes in Chicano Movement literature, which argued that the American narrative of freedom and upward mobility was thwarted by Anglo racism toward their communities.

Fueled by the ideology of “manifest destiny,” U.S. expansion and Anglo settlement of the Southwest persisted. Conflict between ethnic groups, which included

Anglos, Asian and Southern Asians, Mexicans, and Native Americans continued in the newly acquired Southwest territory. Mexican-American land holders were pushed from their homes as the question of ownership arose. In addition, resources traditionally shared communally by local Mexican populations became acquired by Anglo settlers for private and commercial use. In the New Mexico territory, where large tracts of land were granted to Mexican families under the former rule of the Spanish crown, landed families found themselves in conflict with Anglos over the land their families had subsisted on for generations. For the Mexican-American families that occupied the land, it was often hard to establish the “precise limits” of one’s land grant. Moreover, presenting official documentation of ownership proved difficult as well, as many of the families had occupied that land for hundreds of years (Fernandez 21). Ultimately, much of the land was “transferred to private Anglo landholders, to money lenders, or to the federal government” (22). Similarly, in California, Texas, and Arizona land and traditional means of subsistence were usurped by U.S. interests.

In California the issue of proof of ownership was at the forefront of the fight to keep Mexican-American cattle enterprises intact. However, the cost of legal fees and lack of proof of ownership displaced many of the wealthy “Hacendados<sup>2</sup>” (22). As the decades passed, smaller Mexican-American land holdings throughout the Southwest suffered similar fates. Entities such as “[f]ederal agencies, cattle companies, mining enterprises, and other social forces . . . slowly dispossessed [Mexican-Americans] of their traditional sources of livelihood based upon ancient land and water appropriation methods” (ibid).

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<sup>2</sup> Hacendados—the owners of large plantation style ranches.



Needless to say, Mexican-Americans were often not prepared for the social, economic, and cultural upheaval of their long-held means of existence, and their response ranged from violent “guerrilla warfare,” “mixing and marry[ing] with new comer Anglos,” to running for political office (Garcia 25, Rosales xvi).

Despite the omission of Mexican-Americans in most U.S. historical accounts, they have long attempted to be active in policy making and addressing injustice (Gómez-Quíñones 16). UCLA professor Juan Gómez-Quíñones states that “Mexican political activity in the United States generally has been ignored...or, if acknowledged...deemed to be of little significance... [and] inherently defective” (Gómez-Quíñones 17). He goes on to explain how in the past Mexicans were stereotyped as “passive, apolitical, politically submerged, and in the main, [a] nonparticipating group in the political arena” (18). However, a brief look at this group’s history shows the Chicano Movement and its avant-garde literature was not this group’s first attempt to engage the nation. An alternate group narrative than what has been propagated by the dominate Anglo culture can be seen in this group’s history, most notably during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After U.S. acquisition of the Southwest, many Mexican-Americans were politically disenfranchised such as in Texas, where “white-only primaries...grandfather clauses... [and] poll tax[es]” severely inhibited Mexican-American participation and representation. Yet, early on, some were successful in breaking into Anglo dominated politics. In California, Arizona, and especially in New Mexico where the Mexican-American population remained high and wealthy families allied with early Anglo economic interests, many were somewhat successful in retaining political and economic

solvency; however, as Anglo numbers increased and more eastern wealth poured into the area, Mexican-Americans continually suffered from exclusion. The Mexican-American response to U.S. acquisition of the region was not always political and lawful.

At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and on into the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Mexican-Americans resorted to “banditry” and acts of terror as a response to disenfranchisement at the hands of Anglo settlers. Groups such as “Las Gorras Blancas (The White Caps) [and] La Mano Negra (The Black Hand)” utilized “guerilla warfare” in their resistance efforts (Garcia 25). Tearing down fences and “derail[ing] trains, hoping to stem the encroachment of Anglo land development and railroad building,” these uprisings reinforced a stereotype of “banditry” and the innate “cruelty” of the Mexican-American (Rosales 6). As some of these acts corresponded with, and were even inspired by Mexico’s revolution, and as refugees streamed across Mexico’s northern border to escape the perils of war, another stereotype was again reinforced: foreignness. For the Anglo, these actions prompted what had been coined “The Brown Scare,” which worsened racial tensions toward Mexicans and Mexican-Americans across the nation. Anglo suspicion of Mexicans, both nationals and citizens of the U.S., was exacerbated by the revealing of a revolutionary plot by “Texas Mexicans, angry over mistreatment [to] drive Anglos out of the Southwest” which included “execut[ing] all Anglo males over the age of 16” (Rosales 43). The response came from the Texas Rangers. The Rangers, a law enforcement agency tasked with “keeping order” in Texas with a long track record of egregious acts against Mexicans on both sides of the Rio Grande, were celebrated by the dominant Anglo culture in dime novels and newspapers. They were the heroes of “the west,” responsible for taming the wiles of Mexicans and Native Americans alike. Their response to the plot

for annexing the Southwest was preemptively executing hundreds of Mexicans and pushing others across the southern border (ibid).

Engagement through music has long been a characteristic of Mexican-American Southwest culture, especially in Texas and New Mexico where bitter land resource disputes pitted Mexican-Americans against the often highly prejudicial Texas Rangers. Adaptions of Spanish romances ballads, called corridos, became in vogue in the Southwest in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “during the century of border conflict” (Paredes 129-130). These musical ballads captured the happenings of the time and acts of valor and resistance by Mexican men (usually exclusively men). Spanning from roughly 1830 to 1930 the use of corridos documented folkloric versions of events such as “Indian raids, the struggle to establish a Republic of the Rio Grande, and the Guerella warfare against Zachery Taylor’s troops” as well as the heroics of individual men (Paredes 139). One ballad, titled the “Corrido de Jacinto Trevino,” has repetition in some of its stanzas which show how Mexican-Americans viewed the authority of the tyrannical Texas Rangers, stating “Come on, you cowardly Rangers / No baby is agin you” and “Come on, you treacherous Rangers / Come get a taste of my lead” (Parades & Paredes 6). For the Mexican and Mexican-American people, often indiscriminate targets of partisan “justice,” any resistance was cause for celebration. Other lines in the corrido “You are a brave man, Jacinto (spoken by the Texas Ranger) / You make the Mexican proud” show how a starkly different version of the Texas Ranger. In contrast to the iconic hero of Anglo culture, the Texas ranger is presented as cowardly and deferential. The use of song as an instrument of subversion remained prevalent in Mexican American Communities for over a century.

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, organizing, running for public office, and even armed uprisings were indeed a major part of how Mexican-Americans participated in the political process and asserted themselves. Moreover, their songs chronicled many acts of resistance. What is more, resistance to injustice often came in differing forms. In response to lynchings, land grabs, and political subordination Spanish publications were another way Mexican-American fought back. As early as 1855 print publications served to inform and encourage Mexican-Americans of issues both domestic and in Mexico. One publication, “El Clamor Público,” out of Los Angeles printed a disclaimer with each publication stating: “this weekly publication is to provide as quickly as possible all the news of any interest, both foreign and local. At the same time, it is not to organ of any political party or religious sect. It will make use of its greater efforts in favor of the needs of the people.” (Gómez-Quíñones 216). Indeed, “the people” were always at the heart of the Mexican-American’s struggle for equal rights and justice. Much like the subversive acts of the past the literature of the Chicano Movement captured the struggles of the people, acts of resistance, and presented an alternative group narrative to the nation.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century lurched forward Mexican-Americans suffered discrimination and marginalization as many moved into cities and became an inexpensive, labor force for Anglo industry. With urbanization, Mexican-Americans faced new types of problems. Exclusion took a different form as Mexican-Americans in cities began to focus on correcting issues of “restricted housing practices, police brutality, segregated schools, inequitable judicial practices such as exclusion from juries and exceptionally harsh sentences and discriminatory employment practices” (Gómez-Quíñones 49). Again,

organizing became the primary means of addressing years of problematic relations and inequity between Anglos and Mexicans. Though organizers sought to correct injustices, they were tasked with much more. Mexican-Americans were long characterized by stereotypes and their experiences and regional differences varied widely. Activists would have to address these stereotypes and present an alternate narrative to Mexican-Americans and to the nation. With the Civil Rights movement as the backdrop and with the media finally giving some attention to the issues in Mexican-American communities, activist Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales, following a long tradition of resistance through artistic form composed a poem that became the touchstone and collective voice of the Chicano Movement. His poem “I Am Joaquín” presented a collective history and documented the transnational, resistance efforts of the Mexican people in their struggle for legal equality, true justice, and basic dignity. In addition, it exhorted Mexican-Americans to be politically engaged and unite under a “Chicano” identity; an identity that included the Southwest as their Indigenous homeland.

## **“I Am Joaquim:” Identity, Purpose, and the Emerging Consciousness**

The tumultuous 1960s was a time when ethnic minorities in the U.S. were vocally and unashamedly asserting their voices into the discourse and politics of the nation. Many historically disenfranchised groups such as African-Americans, Native-Americans, and Mexican-Americans were mobilizing in an attempt to articulate their communities’ histories and experiences to the nation. The primary goals were to address and correct systemic injustice and expose the many inconsistencies in the national narrative of equality. In the Southwest region of the U.S., Mexican-Americans were organizing to address a number of issues that affected their communities in particular. Fair labor practices, adequate resource distribution, primarily with education and housing, authentic political representation, and an end to police brutality were some of the issues being addressed (Bebout 36). As Mexican-American groups began to order themselves into tangible political organizations, solidarity and inter-group participation became crucial to the viability of these socio-political goals.

With political upheaval as the backdrop, what would be deemed “The Chicano Movement,” emerged. Arizona State University professor, Lee Bebout, in his book *Mythohistorical Interventions: The Chicano Movement and Its Legacies*, suggest that, “[a]lthough often homogenized...the Chicano movement more accurately can be described as a complex, diverse collection of struggles” (3). But how would these groups, many in different states throughout the Southwest, create a sense of unity and solidarity around a common struggle? And what common narrative would capture the plight of a people with often differing experiences in both rural and metropolitan areas? Moreover, how would this narrative be disseminated? Though there are undoubtedly

many variables to these questions, one credible answer could be centered on a leading figure in the Chicano Movement.

When one considers the civil rights movement as a whole, many names come to mind. For the African-American struggle Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Angela Davis are all key figures. Similarly, when one considers the Chicano movement names such as Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta could undoubtedly be uttered in the same breath as Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales. Gonzales’ contribution in the Chicano movement could be considered two-fold. Through his artistic expression he gave Chicano’s a collective voice and narrative to rally around. Some historians would go so far as to argue that his epic poem “I Am Joaquín” and its appeal to homeland and revolution was the ideological basis for the entire movement (Shirley et al 16). While Gonzales is largely known for his epic poem, one cannot dismiss the efforts of his organizing that predate and follow dissemination of the poem.

Indeed, Gonzales’ involvement in the movement stemmed from his exposure to unjust policy. His personal story, while inspirational and intriguing, is wrought with the racial conflict that characterized the nation in the first half of the 20th century. Gonzales was born and raised in Denver, Colorado to a migrant farm worker from Chihuahua, Mexico and a mother who was a resident of Colorado. His mother died at a young age and Gonzales spent much of his youth following the crops with his father, which meant that he switched schools many times (Vigil 5). Author Ernesto Vigil in his text *Crusade for Justice* tells how Gonzales lived in “every barrio” in Denver and attended no fewer than “four grade schools, three junior high schools, and two high schools” (5). At a young age Gonzales was heavily influenced by his father. Prior to immigrating to the U.S., his

father had fought with Pancho Villa in Mexico's revolution. In Vigil's text Gonzales is quoted as saying that his birth place would have been in a suburb outside of Denver, but that "they didn't allow Chicanos in the hospital" (5). The author notes that the Denver Gonzales grew up in was wrought with racist policies, with members of the Ku Klux Klan holding positions from state governor and municipal judges, to Denver's own mayor and chief of police (4).

In the Denver of Gonzales' youth prejudicial policies were imbedded in the community. White women were prohibited from working for any business owned by people of color, including "blacks Greeks, Japanese, Chinese, or Mexicans" (4). Unconstitutional actions against minorities such as the 'check-out' policy where police arrested people without charging them for an indeterminate amount of time while they "checked them out" were routinely employed by police (11). In addition, police brutality and failure to advise prisoners of their rights were persistent problems as well (Vigil 11). Thankfully, Gonzales was not of the mind to stray from a fight. Having been a nominally successful boxer in his teen and early adult years, fighting was something he could identify with (6). Indeed, with his father's stories of revolution, experiences in the fields, and growing up in every Mexican-American enclave in Denver, Gonzales' had revolution in his blood and was familiar with both the rural and urban struggle of the Chicano people.

In 1967, Chicano activist, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, published his 352 line epic poem "I Am Joaquim" This poem was inspirational to fledging Chicano activists during this period. It not only encapsulated the collective history of a people, it also consolidated the many self-identifying terms used by Mexican-Americans, uniting them under a single



title which captured their Indigenous heritage, “Chicano.” Though the Chicano Movement was indeed a collection of loosely affiliated groups, many groups with goals that differed from each other and often centered on specific populations or social circumstance, a sense of solidarity was found by promoting a common narrative in Gonzales’ poem, now a canonical piece of Chicano literature. His poem successfully captured common frustrations and experiences, as well as expounded on the complex history and mestizo identity of Chicano/as; Gonzales’ poem helped bring a structured sense of self to a fragmented movement. Finally, Gonzales’ poem called its reader to be active in the contemporary struggle for justice. Drawing inspiration from the strong, autonomous, faith inspired revolutionary figures of Mexican history and contrasting them with “despots” and tyrants, the poem emboldens its reader to take on idealized qualities of past, powerful men.

During this Chicano movement Gonzales’ poem was inspirational, unifying, and spurred people to action. He created an idealized past, challenged both political passivity and apathy as well as national stereotypes. In conjunction with his poem, his organizing and training of young activist was instrumental in continuing the momentum of that decade. Indeed, he had the people’s best interest at heart, however, he failed to recognize the struggle of roughly half the Mexican-Americans he represented. As one discovers when the poem is examined, women are represented in a culturally idealized manner and play a secondary and supportive role to men. The representations of women in the poem follow the rigid expectations for women in the Mexican community, with women presented as religious zealots, lamenting mothers, and the communal repository of pain and suffering. Unlike the men, the women in Gonzales’ piece are referenced by their

physical characteristics and not as active, revolutionaries; paralleling the Chicano Movement of the time, cultural patriarchy and women's issues were not a pressing matter.

As a whole, Gonzales' poem does not conform to any traditional, European form. It does not focus on rhymes, meter, or iambs; instead the focus of the poem is placed on the content and arching narrative. Gonzales poem moves his reader through the history of Mexican people by focusing on his protagonist "Joaquin" who takes on the identity of many different figures in the poem. At the onset of the piece, Joaquin, is set in the context of the contemporary U.S. Dejected and "confused" the protagonist is keenly aware of his subordinated status and the dominant, economic oppression of Anglo, industrial society.

In the first twenty lines, the reader becomes acquainted with the protagonist's predicament. The reader is asked to consider the state of "Joaquin," an easily, identifiable state of poverty and despair. The poem quickly moves the focus from the protagonist to many differing historical figures. An "I am" motif indicates that the protagonist has shifted his identity to other figures. No longer is the protagonist a lowly consequence of circumstance, instead the protagonist transforms into historical figures of kings, revolutionist, despots, and commoners. As commonly noted by readers of this poem, Joaquin becomes the "every man" to his reader as he moves through Spanish colonialism, Mexican independence, Mexican revolution, and U.S. acquisition and settling of the Southwest.

Gonzales' poem is consistently categorized as "protest" or "movement" poetry and is canonized as such, however there is a complexity movement in the piece that disrupts that categorizing (Shirley et al 16). In his poem, Gonzales grapples with both the

glorious, noble, and revolutionary aspects of Mexican history as well as the internal conflicts; he often does so in the same context; He critiques unfavorable parts of history when many Mexicans opposed revolutionary actions or even aided in subjugation. In doing so, he grapples with the Mexicans' mestizo heritage of being both the conqueror and the conquered. Though the poem identifies a main antagonist, the "gringo society" and "that monstrous, technical, industrial giant called Progress and Anglo success...." it also identifies and takes on the character of minor antagonist within Mexican history. By doing so, Gonzales not only identifies one enemy of liberty, but the enemies within that may oppose the contemporary Chicano struggle. Indeed, for one to understand the movement and action of the poem, one must look at several key areas.

The first several lines of his poem Gonzales' highlights the instability Chicano/as experience as a bi-cultural people. The initial stanza establishes a common condition for the Mexican-American stating as well as the contemporary oppressor:

I am Joaquin, lost in a world of confusion,  
caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,  
confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes,  
suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society.  
My fathers have lost the economic battle  
and won the struggle of cultural survival. (Gonzales 3-8)

Phrases like "...lost in a world of confusion, / caught up in the whirl..." highlight the instability and uncertainty of negotiating socio-cultural values of an Anglo dominated society (Gonzales 3-4). Gonzales establishes how the protagonist is aware of the prejudices and disdain toward his ethnic group by an identifiable dominant group. While

lamenting the influence of modernity on culture and tradition, the protagonist acknowledges that many Chicano/a communities suffer from low socio-economic status and geographical isolation. As the author establishes a common condition, the reader begins to, not only identify, but seek a reason for and escape from such circumstances.

Gonzales' poem capitalizes on the shared feeling of instability by offering his reader an overview of historical precedent. Gonzales' piece vacillates between descriptions of current economic turmoil and homeland diaspora to descriptions of past powerful monarchs and landed people. This juxtaposition of different realities positions Gonzales' audience to yearn for the honorable and validated identity of the highly idealized, pre-contact past. It also creates a space within the poem of stability and safety by asking the reader to look to the past. These purposeful deviations are a useful technique for bringing Gonzales' audience to a desired place. Although Mexican-American pre-contact history certainly came with its own problems, such as resource distribution, classed societies, and military dominated regions, what Gonzalez presents is the idea that a people have a right to be autonomous and economically and socially self-determined, an alternative to their current state.

By expounding on the virtues of self-determination and autonomy through the description of powerful men Gonzales frames an idealized reality for his reader. The first figure introduced in the succession of figures is "Cuauhtémoc," the text states "I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble, / leader of men, king of an empire civilized / beyond the dreams of the gachupín Cortés, / who also is the blood, the image of myself" (Gonzales 21-24). Cuauhtémoc is described "proud and noble" and "[a] leader of men." In describing Cuauhtémoc this way, the reader is drawn away from the antecedent

hopelessness one first see with Joaquin, and pushed toward a pre-colonial past complete with the possibility of a different reality for the present time. Moreover, Gonzales creates a historical model of political autonomy and innate, untapped strength. In this section “the gachupin [or foreigner] Cortez” is used as foil to the idealized Cuauhtémoc, establishing the idea of aboriginal identity facing a dominant colonial power, a theme that was highly utilized during the Chicano Movement (Gonzales 23).

Cortez, in this section, is outside the self-identifying use of the “I am.” However, later in the poem Gonzales moves to include Cortez later by stating “I am the sword and flame of Cortez the despot” (27). By doing so he establishes an internal conflict for his reader, who, at this point was identifying with the succession of powerful, historic figures. Though this move many seem troubling, he will use this movement to spur action from his audience. This example, however, is not the only time Gonzales alludes to internal schisms of Mexican history. Farther into the text one sees this internalizing of a complex, often schismatic history:

I was part in blood and spirit of that courageous village priest

Hidalgo who in the year eighteen hundred and ten

rang the bell of independence and gave out that lasting cry--

El Grito de Dolores

"Que mueran los gachupines y que viva la Virgen de Guadalupe...."

I sentenced him who was me I excommunicated him, my blood.

I drove him from the pulpit to lead a bloody revolution for him and me....

I killed him.

His head, which is mine and of all those

who have come this way,  
I placed on that fortress wall  
to wait for independence. Morelos! Matamoros! Guerrero!  
all companeros in the act, STOOD AGAINST THAT WALL OF INFAMY  
to feel the hot gouge of lead which my hands made.  
I died with them ... I lived with them .... I lived to see our country free.  
(Gonzales 44-58)

This portion of the text alludes to Mexico's revolutionary period and the internal, Mexican resistance to institutional change.

Gonzales forces his reader to identify and internalize negative aspects of their history several more times stating "I am the Rurales, / coarse and brutal," and "I am the despots Díaz," (89-90 & 106). As mentioned previously, the inclusion and self-identifying with the opposition to revolution creates an internal conflict. In this section the reader may no longer be a glorious figure. In contrast, the reader is saddled with a barrage of "I sentenced him.../ I excommunicated him.../ I drove him from the pulpit.... / I killed." Each of these negative attributes are attached to the reader. No longer can the reader stay complacent or outside the struggle. Gonzales is clearly laying out a choice for his reader by using a succession of self-identifying "I[s]." His use of capitalized letters in this passage also conveys a choice to his reader. The phrase "STOOD AGAINST" coupled with "INFAMY" challenges the readers to stand up against seeming insurmountable foes.

Another pre-colonial, figure in Gonzales' assortment of inspiring men is "Netzahualcoyotl." This figure is ascribed very distinct traits. thus scaffolding from prior

figures. The line which introduces this figure is “I am Netzahualcoyotl, great leader of the Chichimecas” (Gonzales 26). Again, the author uses the pre-contact past to establish an idealized self for his reader. The figures he incorporates are identified as “leader[s]” “king[s],” and even “prince[s].” His choice of iconic figures in Mexican history establishes the outcomes being developed by the participants of the Chicano Movement: community leadership: political autonomy: and self-determination. In addition, Gonzales’ piece is challenging the prevalent stereotype of the passive, docile, apolitical, and even criminal Mexican-American by replacing it with an honorable past.

Coupled with the powerful military leaders Gonzales presents, is the idea that land management and property ownership is also a desired ideal. At the time of publication, Spanish land grant issues, largely in Northern New Mexico, were one of several focal areas of the Chicano movement. With this at the forefront many Chicanos would easily identify with the lines:

I owned the land as far as the eye  
could see under the Crown of Spain,  
and I toiled on my Earth and gave my Indian sweat and blood  
for the Spanish master who ruled with tyranny over man and  
beast and all that he could trample  
But...THE GROUND WAS MINE. (Gonzales 29-34).

The importance of land ownership and rights cannot be downplayed. In this section repetition and the past tense emphasize the relationship with the land. What is more, the “I” in the poem is followed by a powerful assertion of rightful ownership, “I owned.” This sentiment is followed by imagery which support the previous claim of true

ownership such as “I toiled...and gave my indian sweat and blood.” This section also alludes to a class division characterizing the “Spanish master” as a tyrant, an allusion easily transposed onto U.S. expansionism. The use of the word “indian” draws on the overarching theme of Indigenous heritage. These words further pull in a multiplicity of Gonzales’ contemporary audience who were fighting to regain land rights, better labor relations in the fields, and also were rejecting a “foreign” stereotype.

Ostensibly, idealized traits, allusions to a glorious past, and the possibility of the restoration of land rights were meant to be inspirational and necessary to achieve the movement’s desired outcomes. Early on, Gonzales’ poem created an idealized self by contrasting the current social conditions of the present with a glorified past. His poem, with its vacillating imagery of great men and despots, works as both an invitation and an alternative, but also seeks to create a sense of urgency. Structurally his poem moves from disorder and hopelessness to purpose and action. His inclusion of non-iconic figures presents a choice to his readers and shows how obstruction of social justice does not solely come from the dominant group. In using the “I am” to include tyrants like “Diaz” (Mexico’s dictator president during the time of their civil war), Cortez the “despot,” and the priest who persecuted and excommunicated Hidalgo, Gonzales is showing another precedent, that conforming or opposing the movement does not help the revolution. The despotic figures show how tyranny persist when there is not enough support for justice. Adding to this, Gonzales pushed for authenticity in the Chicano Movement by stating:

I sometimes

Sell my brother out

And reclaim him



For my own when society gives me

Token leadership

In society's own name. (Gonzales 165-170).

Though political engagement is praised in his poem, Gonzales will not settle for the “token leadership” that requires a lack of principle or is self-serving. The focus of the Chicano Movement was to better the community. Encouraging members to not “Sell [their] brother out” ensures that the member consider what real change looks like.

Gonzales uses multiple strategies to spur his audience toward action. Mimicking the techniques used during Mexico’s struggle for independence from Spain, Gonzales rallies his base of readers by using religious ideology. Even the name of his protagonist draws from Judeo-Christian tradition. The name “Joaquin” is the Spanish equivalent of the Hebrew name “Jehoiachin,” who was an Old Testament king who was conquered by the dominant Babylonians (“meaning, origin”). As a conquered king “Jehoiachin” was imprisoned and lived out his days on the rations of the Babylonian king. Interestingly, the names’ meaning could be translated “elevated of God” or “God will establish” (Bible Gateway). Keeping with the themes of an idealized past that included kings, princes, and land owners who were eventually conquered by an oppressive, dominant force, Joaquin’s namesake easily parallels the action in the poem.

Moreover, the term “I am” has a history that draws from Judeo-Christian tradition and parallels themes in the poem as well. The history of the phrase “I am” evokes powerful references to two iconic stories in Judeo-Christian tradition. Used as an identifier by the Hebrew God, the phrase appears in the story of Moses as he is asked to lead his people out of captivity. Moreover, it is also how Jesus identifies himself in New

Testament, Christian writings. Gonzales is certainly utilizing Christian imagery to establish foundational themes and references in the text. Phrases like “I was he [“Don Benito Juarez, guardian of the Constitution”] on dusty roads on barren land as he protected his archives / as Moses did his sacraments” and “My faith unbreakable, / My blood is pure. / I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ” present allusions to the most liberating instances in Christian tradition (Gonzales 66-67 & 350).

As with African-American rhetoric during the civil rights era, social justice in the Chicano Movement was seen as the “promised land” and the Christ, a poor, persecuted figure spreading the message of a brighter tomorrow was a source of inspiration as well. George Hartley of Ohio State University, in his article “I Am Joaquín: Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales and the Retroactive Construction of Chicanismo” shows that the Christ-like theme of hardship for spiritual good is embedded in the poem. Drawing from the lines “And now! I must choose between the paradox of / victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger, / or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis, / sterilization of the soul and a full stomach” he asserts “This willingness to sacrifice the body in order to regenerate the soul gives this nascent Chicanismo its urgency and strength.” It is apparent that Gonzales is using religious imagery and allusions to rally and encourage.

It is not only the first few lines that draw on the religious imagery and reference to revolution. Gonzales’ lines “the priests, both good and bad, took-- / but gave a lasting truth that Spaniard Indian Mestizo / were all God's children” help establish the idea of equality (Gonzales 38-40). By utilizing the word “truth” in these lines, he then challenges his reader to consider their, or their communities’, current state. One can conclude that Gonzales is, once again, inciting his reader toward action. Moreover, the lines that follow

“from these words grew men who prayed and fought / for their worth as human beings. for that / GOLDEN MOMENT of FREEDOM” outline the goal of the movement: cultural recognition and equality (Gonzales 41-43). At the onset of this poem Gonzales establishes that the condition of Mexican-American’s during that time is not equal in the “gringo society,” and that the “rules” and “attitudes” are not applied evenly; it is stated unequivocally in his piece that economically, socially, and culturally the Mexican-American does not enjoy that foundational, creator endowed, equality the nation propagates. As the poem progresses he overtly states “Equality is but a word.” Gonzales’ poem directly addresses the political, social, and economic state of a Mexican-American population and calls out the overt and systemic societal contradictions (Gonzales 221).

Gonzales lays out a long list of contemporary usurpations, abuses, and injustices to build upon his opening lines “Caught up in a whirl of a gringo society.” In the end, Gonzales’ poem leads his reader to become revolutionary and, through faith, persistence, and struggle become like the idealized leaders of old. He momentarily switches from his first person narrative to embrace his audience:

And in all the fertile farmlands,  
the barren plains,  
the mountain villages,  
smoke-smeared cities,  
we start to MOVE.

La raza!

Méjicano!

Español!

Latino!

Chicano! (Gonzales 327-336)

Many of the fragmented groups of activist seen this poem as a call to action. In the section above Gonzales is calling Chicanos from all walks of life. Careful to include all Chicano locales and experiences, he addresses specific geographical areas. He states “farmlands,” “plains,” “villages,” and “cities” drawing on the people from California to the Midwest and from Northern New Mexico, Colorado, and the urban struggles of Los Angeles, Tucson, and El Paso. In this section, every separate struggle is called to unite under the banner of “Chicano” and to incorporate their history into their activism. Though Gonzales poem has the semblance of inclusion, it fails to address the issues of women in the movement.

In Gonzales’ piece women indeed hold a place of reverence. His characterization of them is presented in tandem with religious devotion. Though he uses religious devotion to mirror the hope and persistence needed to enact change on a political level, he also strips the women in his piece from any direct action. Unlike the men in his piece, who are often seen as dominant militarily, or actively involved in some type of resistance, be that a reformer or a casualty of political struggles, the women are presented in stereotypical female roles, or as inactive supporters of men. The “black-shawled Faithful women” in his piece serve only one purpose, a repository of suffering, pain, and anxiety. The women of this piece embody the spirit of “token leadership” by being included with the dominant group, but serving to further the status quo which keeps them subordinate.

Many critics have commented on Gonzales use of the archetypical anguished, mother and how his representation of women is minimal, limiting, unspecified, and

stereotypical. Author Josè Eduardo Limòn in his book *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican American Social Poetry* does lament Gonzales' failure to "move beyond his conscious and rhetorical political poetics [and create] an extended, well etched rendering of women" (127). Further, he states that "no dominated people can effectively engage their oppressors with one of the gender pair..." (ibid). However, he diverges to state "these lines are a fine poetic etching of woman that any cultural citizen of greater Mexico would recognize and appreciate" (125). The lines he refers to present the woman as a suffering mother:

I am in the eyes of woman,  
sheltered beneath  
her shawl of black,  
deep and sorrowful eyes  
that bear the pain of sons long buried or dying, (Gonzales 267-271)

Though Limòn and Gonzales appear to be reverential toward women their lack of acknowledgement and engagement with substantive Chicana issues or cultural patriarchy negates women's struggles and is actually dismissive of women. What they are truly showing reverence to is the woman's role in Mexican society and not the individual as seen with the men in the poem. Furthermore, Gonzales presents women in his poem, unlike their male counterparts, not by specific deed, place, or action, but by elevating their ubiquitous religious devotion and supportive roles. Women are thus, defined by men. Limòn's critique offers up praise for the unnamed woman caricature, however, in doing so he defers to a dominant, cultural representation of women; the very representation that is responsible for the restrictive, cultural limits on women.

Though Limòn's discourse on the "etching" of women in the text is questionable, his insight into the poem's influences, precursors, and movements is very informative. In his text Limòn establishes specific characteristics of a corrido. He points out how the corrido focuses on a "single, specific historical even in a circumscribed temporal moment" (Limòn 119). And, states that the corrido is punctuated by areas of "boastful dialogue" from the story's hero, but never told in first person (118). Referencing the corrido mentioned previously, "Corrido de Jacinto Trevino," one will notice that this folkloric tale presents a single incident between a Texas Ranger and Jacinto Trevino: "Come on, you cowardly Rangers / No baby is agin you" and "Come on, you treacherous Rangers / Come get a taste of my lead" (Parades & Paredes 6). A corrido, being part of a musical tradition, may also has repetition in some of its stanzas which emphasize the point being made.

Limon continues on by stating that some critics have made a hasty leap in asserting that Gonzales' poem, exclusively, follows the tradition of the corrido. Limòn, in agreement with critic Cordelia Candelaria, asserts that Gonzales is additionally following the tradition of the "epic hero" form in which the corrido "participates" in, but is stylistically different form (116). In terms of form, the "epic hero" style differs from the corrido in that it uses first person "I" throughout, opposed to a third person narrator establishing a context and conveying dialogue. In addition, the "epic hero" style does not limit itself to a single incident. Similar to Gonzales' poem, the "epic hero" style may cover a wide spanse of time. Finally, the "epic hero" form creates what Limòn calls a "continuous first person boast," which differs from the corrido (Limòn 116).

Moreover, Limòn upholds Cordelia Candelaria assertion that Gonzalez is “modeling” his poem after a specific “epic hero” legend mentioned in the poem: Joaquin Murrieta of California. In Limòn’s assessment of Gonzales’ poem, he asserts that the legend of “Joaquin Murrieta of California” was his primary, stylistic inspiration. He qualifies that by stating the lyrics of Joaquin Murrieta’s ballad. He shows selections of the song such as:

I have ridden through California  
In the year 1850...  
With my saddle inlaid with silver  
and my pistol full  
I am the Mexican  
Named Joaquin Murrieta  
I can make any American  
tremble at my feet (117)

Moreover, Limòn comments on the “epic hero” style by stating “this self-centered poetics also characterizes ‘I Am Joaquin’” (ibid). The lyrics above show a definite similarity with Gonzales’ poem. The repetitive use of the “I” parallels the poem. Limòn goes on to state “it does present the traditional heroic figure, pistol in hand opposing the forces of oppression, the americans,” however, Gonzales poem does not consistently keep that format (117).

Though it’s undeniable that Gonzales was influenced by both corridos and the folkloric “epic hero,” Limòn’s assertion are do not account for every sections of the text.

Limón mentions that the poem purposefully diverges from hopelessness to heroic “self centeredness,” in an action he calls “highs and lows.” He calls Gonzales’ use of purposeful falling and rising action “the swerve” (118). What he fails to address is the complexity of the “lows” and how Gonzales’ poem does not continue in the epic hero “boast,” unhindered. As discussed in the poem’s initial analysis Gonzales places his reader in the position of tyrant as well as hero.

At the start of Gonzales’ poem there is indeed the “low” that presents the status of Joaquín. Gonzales quickly moves to the “boast” by outlining the idealized pre-colonial figures: “I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble, / leader of men, king of an empire civilized / beyond the dreams of the gachupín Cortés, / who also is the blood, the image of myself. / I am the Maya prince. / I am Netzahualcoyotl, great leader of the Chichimecas” (21-26). These lines are indeed boastful and show Cortés as one outside the “I am” schema. As pointed out earlier, Gonzales forces his reader to come to terms with a complicated history. He does so by including Cortés among the “I am[s]” of Mexico’s indigenous, and gloriously portrayed past, Gonzales is breaking from the continuous lines of boasting form found in Limón’s “epic hero” example, “Joaquín Murrieta of California” and humanizing the Mexican experience. In Gonzales’ piece the “lows” do not simply push the reader toward the “highs,” they are an indictment of one’s self and an opportunity to resolve historical and personal inaction. Though the difference may be subtle, the poem must be viewed as an embodiment of one’s psyche; one must acknowledge and accept one’s past in order to transform. The Chicano Movement was undeniably looking to transform Chicano/as into “conscious” individuals.



The culmination of this effect was seen in Gonzales' hometown in an event he organized. In 1969, following his work with the Poor Peoples Campaign in Washington D.C. and his return to Denver, Gonzales' group, Crusade for Justice, began organizing the "Chicano Youth Liberation Conference" (Vigil 95). Planning for a few hundred the event bloomed to several thousand. The women involved in the "Crusade" initially participated by "secur[ing] cots and blankets" for the attendees. It was during this event that Chicanas asserted themselves into the fight for equality by organizing an impromptu "Women's Workshop" (96). The outcome, however, was not as would be expected. One statement often quoted from this workshop is "It was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated" (Vidal). The male response to the impromptu workshop was bewilderment and attributing the "Women's Workshop" to the work of a few "women 'intellectuals.'" (Vigil 97). Ironically, the outcome, including the idea that women did not "want to be liberated," would be the fuel for the women in the Chicano movement to assert themselves. At the time, Chicanas were pigeon-holed into "traditional" gendered roles, but they would soon question historical, cultural molds.

Gonzales' poem succeeded in doing much for the Chicano Movement. It established the current status of Mexican-American and outlined achievable goals through historical precedent. It created an idealized set of characteristics an engaged community should strive for, and it brought together the different types of Chicano struggle. Most notably it helped create a medium for Chicano/as to come to terms with their complex history; in doing so it help create a consciousness that sought to correct inaction. Still, the representation of women in Gonzales' poem is indicative the limitations women faced in Mexican communities. Perhaps it was the early death of

Gonzales' mother that caused him to elevate the "ideal" woman in his poem. Or, it is quite possible that Gonzales was focused on appropriating religion as a means of inspiration. In any case, Chicanas began to establish critiques of cultural patriarchy and to establish a platform that was representative of their needs. Over the decades following the publication of Gonzales' poem, Chicanas would write essays, make films, and publish works of literature such as Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* and Cherrie Moraga's poetry *Loving in the War Years* that directly confronted the stereotyped images from the poem. These works, often using the same idealizing of autonomy and strength that Gonzales afforded the male figures in his work, would move beyond cultural, patriarchy and examine issues of female voice, gender boundaries, and taboo sexuality.

## **Chicana Feminism: Conflict on All Sides**

On the continuum of Mexican history, women's involvement in revolutionary acts is often ignored or overshadowed by male acts or accomplishments. As seen in Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales' poem, "I Am Joaquin," women are revered in Mexican culture for their support of men, upholding of tradition, and ability to endure the suffering of the community. In contrast to this representation, Mexican women's involvement in resistance movements parallels that of their male counterparts. Historically, acts of resistance by Mexican and Mexican-American women were not always for the purpose of securing rights and cultural egalitarianism. Moreover, acts of resistance by women, much like the overview of revolutionary history Gonzales offers, were often intimately tied to class, labor, and political struggles.

Mexican women have always fought in tandem with men during the most contentious times in Mexican and American history, yet they've rarely enjoyed any semblance of equality. Though there are many variables that contribute to the subordination of Mexican women, their status within society was not always that of the subordinate. The documentary, *Chicana*, by film maker Sylvia Morales, outlines the historical change in woman's status in pre-contact Mesoamerica. The film states that historians ignore the "Great Mother" of early indigenous cultures along with the plethora of pre-Columbian female deities. Morales highlights the goddess *Coatlique* who reigned "seven centuries before the Aztecs" and expounds on the robust attributes of this goddess: creation, death, pain, and abundance. Gloria Anzaldúa, in her text *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestizo*, adds that prior to the militarization of Aztec culture "the principle of balanced opposition between the sexes existed [and] [t]he people worshipped

the lord and lady of duality...” (Anzaldúa 53-4). In early Toltec and Aztec society the connection to one’s heritage was through the woman (55). Women in these societies were how one determined one’s lineage. Moreover, women were not positioned as powerless domestics. They often held positions of authority, and important vocations such as priestesses, and “curers” rested in their hands. Along with the ability to navigate power dynamics and varying roles, women held rights of property as well (ibid).

Though the Aztec society, prior to European contact, had already moved away from this early, egalitarian society, Spanish colonization fueled the emergence of a new type of gendered binary based on the role of women in Christian tradition. The appropriation of pre-Columbian female deities into Mexican Catholicism severely limited the perception of idealized womanhood. Deities such as *Coatlique* and *Tonantzin* were appropriated and transformed into Mexico’s lauded *Virgen de Guadalupe*. However, this change did not account for the multidimensional understanding of woman in pre-Columbian culture. Subsequently, this new figure “was more passive than the ancient figures, who were active, multifaceted, and independent sources of power” (Gómez-Quíñones 5). Thus, women lost many of the empowering features they enjoyed with unadulterated versions of Mesoamerican deities.

The representation of women in Gonzales’ poem parallels the attributes associated with *the Virgin De Guadalupe*. Morales states that *Guadalupe* is considered “morally superior” figure in Mexican society “because of her ability to endure pain.” Morales’ statement suggest that on the continuum of Mexican women, *Guadalupe* is idealized for unwavering acceptance the hardships. In addition, the embracing of *Guadalupe* as the idealized depiction of womanhood perpetuates motherhood as the idealized vocation for

women. Gonzales asserts that the eyes of woman “deep and sorrowful...bear the pain of sons long buried or dying” paralleling the Virgin of Christian tradition, who, because of her religious devotion was chosen to be the mother of Christ and watch as her son suffered from a Roman crucifixion. Moreover, the elevation of motherhood as an idealized role serves to perpetuate the patriarchal society of colonial New Spain. Women were expected to bear children to ensure both the labor supply as well as the expansion of the chauvinistic hacienda system where the “Padron” ruled with impunity (Morales).

The establishment of women’s role in Mexican culture, however, did not hinder their participation in many of the major resistance movements. Despite Gonzales’ overview of Mexican history that excludes woman’s participation, women fought for the right to education and revolution as well as labor rights and civil liberties. During Mexico’s revolution, women (disguised as men) fought alongside men reaching ranks as high as general (Morales). In Brownsville, Texas Dona Estafana Cortina, the mother of Juan Cortina who was immortalized in a Texas border corrido for his acts of resistance in a newly annexed, Texas land dispute, shot anyone that trespassed on her land and “poisoned Texas rangers at tea parties” (Morales). Moreover, long after U.S. acquisition of the Southwest Mexican-American women organized labor strikes in both agriculture and industrial labor (Melville 224).

Indeed, similar to the Mexican male, Mexican and Mexican-American women were far from passive and their participation in resistance movements spans beyond the “Chicano/a movement” or “Chicana feminism.” Though the term “Chicana feminism” is used to describe both a theoretical framework as well as the actions of women within the Chicano/a movement, it is not synonymous with the women’s suffrage movement of the

late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, nor the woman's liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s. While one might assume that women's movements in the U.S. would have encompassed the needs of all women, they often excluded women of color and were hindered by issues such as class and perception.

In America during the late 19<sup>th</sup> many of the women fighting for voting rights were Anglo women of the middle class (Melville 219). A general disdain for those of lower, socio-economic status permeated the suffragists' movement, which included the recently immigrated and people of color. Though there were undoubtedly some that supported self-determinism for minority women, many of the more vocal leaders did not hide their disdain. One of the arguments employed by Anglo suffragists was that voting rights for "native born" Anglo women would "offset the strength of black votes" (220).

Correspondingly, both "educational requirements and literacy test" were advocated for at the National American Woman Suffrage Association convention in 1889 in an attempt to curtail the "ignorant vote" (219). In time, restrictions placed on voting such as "poll taxes...proof of citizenship, which many second and third generation citizens were afraid to put to the test because of frequent deportations...[and] intimidation by law enforcement" would disenfranchise both Mexican-American and African-American women (223-4). Chicanas, as well as African-American women, were not seen as equals in the fight for women's rights.

Though Mexican-American women were excluded from the broader women's rights movement, they continued to fight for fair labor practices and living wages. In doing so they often allied with socialist labor organizers; a move that pushed them further away from Anglo dominated women's movement (223). During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,

Chicanas used many of the same tactics to fight for worker's rights that were previously used in earlier resistance movements such as organizing protest, printing material, and running for public office. As the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century approached the Chicano movement absorbed and unified many of the regional struggles being fought.

In spite of Chicana participation in Mexican and Mexican-American historical struggles, Chicanas were still subjected to subordinate status among those that would seem the most likely allies. A 1971 article by Mirta Vidal titled *Women: New Voice of La Raza* states that:

Because sexism and male chauvinism are so deeply rooted in this society, there is a strong tendency, even within the Chicano movement, to deny the basic right of Chicanas to organize around their own concrete issues. Instead they are told to stay away from the women's liberation movement because it is an "Anglo thing." (Vidal).

Indeed, Chicanas and their issues were being neglected within the Chicano movement and cultural mores relegated Chicanas to a lower, subordinate status. However, schisms among Chicanas and with the women's liberation movement kept Chicanas from gaining much traction early on. Much like with the earlier suffrage movement, the middle class demands of the Anglo dominated women's liberation movement, often led by ivy league alumni, did not embrace the needs of working class women who were often looked at as "quaint and inarticulate" (Melville 227).

In addition many Chicanas were unwilling to fully divorce themselves from the heavy, cultural emphasis of the Chicano movement; a movement largely defined by male-centric attributes. Cherríe Moraga address this tendency in her essay *We Fight Back*

*with Our Families* when she states “the Chicana feminist attempting to critique the sexism in the Chicano community is certainly between a personal rock and a political hard place...The feminist-oriented material...in the late 70s and 80s for the most part strains in its attempt to stay safely within the boundaries of Chicano—male defined and often anti-feminist—values” (Moraga 97). Moraga’s statement reveals how Chicanas, entrenched in a majority-minority dichotomy, must work within these limitations. Furthermore, they must present their grievances with prescribed gendered roles to the movement and community; a community they must also live amongst. The “personal rock and political hard place” Moraga speaks of analogizes the subjugated, minority Chicana’s choice of political disenfranchisement or cultural ostracism; a choice to speak out on issues that are not popular within the community nor in dominant Anglo culture or stay silent.

Despite the refusal by the Chicano and the women’s liberation movement to fully embrace Chicana feminism, Chicanas began organizing on their own. Chicana conferences, workshops, and caucuses within larger conferences were being initiated and helped to articulate their needs. Many of the concerns of Chicanas centered around policy such as access to education, contraceptives, abortion, and childcare, still, other concerns dug deeper into institutional and cultural problems such as perception by school administrators, educational and career opportunities, confronting the institutional chauvinism of the Catholic church and larger culture that kept women “subordinated,” and respect and dignity for woman’s position, whether in or outside the home (Vidal). Unlike the larger women’s movement, Chicana feminism stood rooted in identity and culture as it presented issues to the community. In tandem with the Chicano movement,



community building, strong leadership, cultural solidarity, and political action were still part of the Chicana feminist platform.

The burgeoning Chicana feminism certainly fought on many fronts. In addressing Chicana issues many tactics were employed. Unquestionably, outlining problems at conferences and workshops as well as publishing articles in journals and Chicano/a publications was an effective and direct strategy; however, the use of the arts such as theatre and literature was pervasive as well. The emergence of "*Teatro Chicano*" a "national theatre movement" utilized by the Chicano Movement helped Chicanas bring up many of their own issues while incorporating humor (Melville 96). Literature addressed many issues as well and opened up new talking points in Chicana feminism, as issues brought to light early in Chicana feminism were not as far reaching as some would have hoped. Some of the thematic issues brought about by Chicana literature opened up a new "space" for considering the historical representation of women, cultural approval, and Chicana sexuality.

As decades rolled on, the issues dealt with in Chicana feminism were broadened and the hard topics within Chicano/a culture and community began to be addressed. Chicana feminist literature boldly took on many entrenched cultural mores. Some of the themes of Chicana literature are the "autobiographical voice," the coopting of the male ideal, the "speaking of secrets" in regards to sexuality and community homophobia, seeking to give a voice to the silenced, and the creation of an unapologetic "space" for Chicanas that did not fit neatly into gendered binaries, yet, were not willing to be dismissed or marginalized by their culture (Davalos 151-55).

Chicana authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and many, many others used a blend of both prose, poetry, and personal experience to convey their experiences as Chicanas. Many of their experiences reveal the tremendous fear women have in confronting cultural standards. Moraga reveals that when her novel *Loving in the War Years* was set to be released, she retreated to the “anonymity” of Mexico (Moraga 1). Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking text reveals how she became acquainted with darkness and how writing is something akin to bodily mutilation. Moreover, Cisneros text displays a silenced women living in isolation and in fear of an abusive husband. These experiences are not simply the work of fiction. Chicana writers capture the emotional turmoil and cultural, sanctioning of oppressive gender roles.

The utilizing of the aforementioned themes and techniques in Chicana literature directly confronts stereotypical, misogynist representations of women found in earlier works, as is the case with Gonzales’ canonized poem *I Am Joaquin*. In Chicana feminist literature, the woman is no longer the simple, melancholy, religious zealot, destined to bear the pain and suffering of the community; contrary to that women are presented as multidimensional characters that inhabit many “spaces.” They are credited with the same idealized characteristics that Gonzales presents in his male figures. They are autonomous, strong, self-determined and refuse to conform to contrived boundaries.

### **Cisneros & Moraga: Rejecting Molds, Revitalizing Myth, & Creating Spaces**

Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ piece was the touchstone for an era of revolutionary change. It created an idealized structure for individual Chicanos and set the parameters for enacting political change. In addition, it gave community and group leaders a common narrative, a working template, as well as an important objective: community leadership, political autonomy, and self-determination. Through these values he creates a mold for one to engage societal and community problems. Though the intent of Gonzales’ piece was largely to empower and exhort Mexican-Americans toward engagement in the political realm, Mexican-American women were not empowered by their representation in Gonzales’ piece, which reflected a limited role within the movement and culture. Ultimately, Chicana authors used many of the same values Gonzales presents to break away from the cultural and community oppression they’ve historically faced, while at the same time redefining women in the culture, allowing for women to have a voice, and challenging the boundaries of gender roles and sexuality in the culture. Several examples of this can be seen in Sandra Cisneros’ short piece “Woman Hollering Creek” and Cherríe Moraga’s poem “Loving on the Run.”

Early in Sandra Cisneros’ short story, “Woman Hollering Creek,” one sees a common depiction of women in Mexican-American communities. Many of the women in her text are defined by their gendered roles and duties. Much like the women in Gonzales’ poem, who are presented as the embodiment of faith and temperance, and the conveyors of communal emotion, namely sorrow and pain, Cisneros’ piece presents some of her early characters in like fashion. Though Gonzales’ poem sought to present women reverently, he characterizes their roles as inactive, supportive, and subordinate. It is

through these terms that women are to be understood by the community. Cisneros work presents this type of stereotypical gender framing as she establishes the initial characters in her story.

At the onset of Cisneros' story she presents several female characters and establishes the parameters of how the reader is to understand them. The characters are presented through an omniscient narrator that helps form small details of the story. The narrator gives insight into the lives of minor characters as well as the protagonist, Cleofilas Enriqueta DeLeòn Hernandez. From the start Cleofilas' father is seen giving his "permission" to the young man who is to marry his daughter (Cisneros 43). Within the first paragraph the narrator establishes that Cleofilas life prior to marriage consisted of endless chores and serving the needs of her six brothers and father. Cleofilas, as the only woman in the home, is tasked with the domestic duties of the entire household. This image of patriarchy and gender roles is indicative of culturally, sanctioned limitations Cisneros challenges later in the text. Similar to the Gonzales' piece the primary female character, is presented and defined by her role in relation to the men in her life. As the story progresses the narrator expands the scope of focus from Cleofilas to the minor characters.

Cisneros' use of minor characters illustrates a sense of communal understanding of what the role of women should be in their culture. The focus first falls on Cleofilas' maid of honor, Chela. The text states that during the "hubbub of parting," and after her wedding, Cleofilas was looking for Chela "to fulfill their bouquet conspiracy" (43). The author firmly establishes Cleofilas subservience to men early on, and uses the character of Chela to expand the reader's focus. In trying to fulfill the "bouquet conspiracy" the

author gives the reader a snapshot of the larger, cultural values at play. By getting married Cleòfilas is fulfilling her framed role as a male accessory, but by conspiring to push her friend into that same role, she is perpetuating this cultural framework. One will find that several of the early characters in Cisneros' text are portrayed as heavily conforming to this cultural framing of women and their roles.

Following her marriage ceremony, Cleòfilas arrives at her new home in Seguin, Texas. She reveals that her home is in an isolated, rural area with only two "neighbor ladies," who are introduced as "The woman Soledad on the left, the woman Dolores on the right" (46). Cisneros describes "Soledad" as a woman that "likes to call herself a widow," but never mentions how her husband died, or if he simply left her for another woman (46). The next figure "...la Señora Dolores" is described in terms as having a house that smelled "of incense and candles from alters that burned continuously in memory..." of her sons that died in battle and her husband that died shortly after (47). Each of these women are described in relation to their domestic home life and the men in their lives. Their identity is in fact framed out of cultural constructs.

Similar to the female characters in Gonzales' poem, the depiction of Dolores and Soledad in Cisneros work are presented in like fashion. Gonzales' poem states that a black shawled woman "...bear[s] the pain of sons long buried or dying, / dead on the battlefield or on the barbed wire of social strife." His piece presents a woman who "prays" and "fingers...[her] rosary" endlessly (Gonzales 268-273). In the same fashion Cisneros' character Dolores, is presented as constantly maintaining her religious shrine to her dead husband and sons. In addition, she clips flowers every Sunday to arrange on their gravestones. Her life and identity are presented through her attachment to men and

religious devotion. The narrator asserts that both Dolores and Soledad's lives are busy with "remembering the men who had left through either choice or circumstance and would never come back" (47). Moreover, Cisneros placement of Cleofilas speaks to the choices Mexican and Mexican-American women are presented with. Couched between "Dolores," which means sorrow and "Soledad," which means solitude, Cleofilas is presented with two realities for Mexican-American women, which is the religious zealot or subordinate domestic both of which are silenced by cultural and gender roles. Though it would seem as though Cisneros is complacent with the cultural framing of the female in Mexican-American communities, she is actually illustrating the precedent of female representation to her reader; the same precedent found in Gonzales' representation of women.

The setting in Cisneros' story also works to illustrate gender divisions and the established, culturally inspired framing of female identity. The work's title "Woman Hollering Creek" is in reference to a geographical feature near the home of Cleofilas. The arroyo's official name is "La Gritona" or "Woman Hollering." Cleofilas is fascinated and intrigued by the name of this stream and seeks to find the name's origin (46). At first encounter, however, Cleofilas makes an observation of the arroyo as she is being brought to her new home in Texas. She laughs at the name and thinks the name is funny. She states that the creek is pretty and so full of "happily ever after." Throughout the story Cleofilas is shown nearing the banks of the arroyo. The neighbor women warn her not to go near it, to stay away from it, and that it's safer for her and her children near their home. These exhortations by the much older neighbor women speak to how entrenched the cultural mores are in Chicano and Mexican culture. Sylvia Morales states that that

“respect for women comes late in life” and any deviation from gender norms imposes carries with it the scornful gaze of both the men and women in the community.

The author presents the arroyo as “a good size alive thing, a thing with a voice all its own” an entity that “all day and all night [is] calling in its high, silver voice,” which causes Cleòfilas to think that the river is actually La Llorona calling to her (51). Author Mary Louise Pratt in her article “‘Yo Soy La Malinche’; Chicana Writers and the Poetics of Ethnonationalism” explains how La Llorona, is a Mexican, mythical story figure from Cleòfilas’ childhood. La Llorona, the weeping woman “who drowned her own children,” after a betrayal by her husband (the betrayal varies among differing versions of the myth) is often viewed in relations to La Malinche, a scorned female figure in Mexican history. La Malinche, is most often characterized as being a trader to her people (51). According to historical accounts, La Malinche, was born into the “privileged, educated class” (Candelaria 2). Her father was said to be an Aztec-Mexica Chief (ibid). After her father’s death, Maninche’s mother gave her away to secure her inheritance for the son of her second husband. Cordelia Candelaria’s draws a contrary view of La Malinche. She suggest that it was Malinche that was first betrayed by her mother and it was through tactic cultural negotiations and her use of language that La Malinche rose to be a women of notoriety among both the Spanish and Aztec-Mexica people.

Though the story presents Cleòfilas as an isolated mother, with an uncaring drunkard husband, the arroyo named “Woman Hollering” does not symbolize despair or a woman on the brink of recklessness. Contrary to that notion the arroyo, a geographical dividing line, symbolizes the cultural gender divisions in society. The narrator’s intrigue with the arroyo and its name is representative of a woman approaching the borders of

gender roles, an act seen as a betrayal within community dynamics. In giving the arroyo a “voice” and drawing a parallel with La Llorona, and by extension La Malinche, Cisneros is recapturing the voice of scorned women and recovering the image of La Malinche. Moreover, the characters Dolores and Soledad, in trying to persuade Cleofilas to not approach the arroyo help establish the push and pull of gender discourse in the community. Similar to La Malinche’s mother, who sold out her own daughter, Dolores and Soledad are betraying Cleofilas by attempting to keep her firmly entrenched in culturally, sanctioned gender roles.

Cisneros’ use of imagery in this work is significant because each image carries weighty connotation. Cisneros uses both physical and geographical aspects of the landscape to establish areas of divisions. Her insertion of the U.S. Mexico border, La Gritona arroyo, and the bridge that spans the arroyo, all act as symbolic markers in the text. Cleofilas mentions how the town itself is “...built so that you have to depend on your husband. Or you stay home” (51). Cleofilas states that one can drive to town, but acknowledges that one must be “...allowed to drive, your own car” (51). According to Cleofilas, her husband controls as aspects of her life. Including her driving privileges. Moreover, the town is complicit in so much that it is built to encourage women’s dependency on men. Comparable to how Gonzales places the female characters in his poem, the women in this town are placed in a male privileged society.

Similar to Cisneros’ physical and geographical divides in the setting of the story, the deep cultural borders and divisions that exist between the sexes are detectable as well. The women that are urging Cleofilas to stay away from the arroyo, the dividing waters; these dividing waters speak to Cleofilas. While the arroyo speaks to her in a “silver



voice,” the women closest to Cleòfilas are encouraging her to stay away from the dividing waters of the arroyo; essentially, to not confront these divisions. Author Jacquelyn Doyle suggest that “Cisneros invokes the centuries-old tradition of female silence, subservience, and suffering underwritten by Mexican culture and the Catholic Church...” However, Cisneros is employing a new, empowering reading of the cultural myth of the La Llorona. As mentioned previously, La Llorona is the wailing woman who drowned her children. Though stories differ as to her motive, what is constant is that she has betrayed the Mexican woman’s idealized vocation and duty: motherhood and her support of the male. In Cisneros’ text, rather than simply using the wailing of the La Llorona to show the pain and suffering of women, Cisneros reintroduces and revitalizes this mythical figure by giving her a “high, silver voice” (51). The representation of woman with volition and voice is directly contrary to Gonzales’ representation of women. Cisneros’ use of voice creates a space for a new understanding of La Llorona; one which empowers her to speak.

Ostensibly, it would seem that Cisneros is simply pointing out the obvious inequality between men and women in this culture. In contrast, the first part of the story merely establishes the overt cultural issue of gender framing while the rest of the story complicates it. She leads the reader to believe that Cleòfilas is similar the other culturally acceptable women in the text, Dolores and Soledad, and the representations of women found in the Gonzales poem, faithful, longsuffering, and committed to patriarchy. However, Cleòfilas, like the new revitalized La Llorona speaks out about the abuse she has endured at the hands of her husband. She is not silent; she articulates her betrayal. This new found voice incites action in the story and a succession of strong women that

are in conflict with cultural, gender roles. The nurse sets up transport for Cleòfilas to act and leave her abusive husband. The author's use of crying in this section hearkens back to Cleòfilas' thoughts about the Woman Hollering arroyo, where she thought about the myth of La Llorona, the crying woman that drowned her children, thus betraying her family and community. Though Cleofilas' confiding in the nurse can be viewed as an act of desperation, it can also be seen as an act of rebellion against culturally imposed gender roles. As the bearer of suffering and pain, she is culturally encouraged to be committed to her abusive husband and to bear the abuse silently. However, following the lead of the revitalized La Llorona, Cleòfilas chooses to act rather than simply wail.

Cisneros' presentation of the Woman Hollering arroyo is not structured around a woman's loss or suffering in domestic life. Instead, the arroyo's purpose in the text is to bridge and confront the cultural gender framing. Cisneros' last section in her story introduces the reader to a female character that has internalized the idealized qualities found in the Gonzales poem: self-autonomy and individual-determinism. In the final section of the text Cleòfilas is following through with her decision to leave her abusive husband. Her breaking of her silence has freed her from the bondage of patriarchy. She is being driven to the bus stop by a new character, Felice. When Cleòfilas and Felice drive across the arroyo, Felice "...open[s] her mouth and let[s] out a yell as loud as any mariachi" (55). She reveals that each time she crosses the bridge she hollers because of the name of the arroyo. She goes on to point out that nothing in the area is named after a woman "unless she's a virgin," (55). In moving freely through cultural divides, Felice is able to recognize and repudiate another persistent barrier to women, how women are idealized and valued for their chastity only. Cisneros' final character is unique from all

the other female characters in the text. She is able to recognize divisionary culture practices and navigate the borders of gender framing in the community. In addition, she is not a “silenced” character and does not commit herself to culturally imposed roles. Her name, Felice (meaning happy), suggest that happiness is through autonomy and shirking imposed barriers.

Cleòfilas had never encountered a woman that dared to cross the established cultural divisions. She is in awe that Felice owns her own truck “a pickup, mind you...” she states. She notes how Felice does not have a husband, and how Felice had chosen the truck and was paying for it herself, contradicting the dependency on men which the town is built around. In Cisneros’ story Cleòfilas had ventured near the banks of the arroyo, despite the warnings from the other women. It was, however, Felice, the strong, autonomous, economically self-determined character that illustrated the crossing of that divide. Cleòfilas notes how Felice hollers like Tarzan when she crosses the bridge, and how Felice’s laughter sounded like a “...gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter like water,” reminding the reader of the dividing waters of the arroyo and the “voice” of the appropriated La Llorona (56).

The author’s portrayal of her character Felice follows another precedent established by the Gonzales’ poem. It shows a character that encompasses all the values of an idealized self, yet is not male. Gonzales poem “I Am Joaquin” did not afford women the opportunity to be anything other than a male centered, supportive role. Cisneros’ character unapologetically adopts Gonzales’ revolutionary idealized values as her own and uses them to confront common cultural gender framing. Cisneros is not the

only Chicana writer to address this cultural gender framing. Authors Cherríe Moraga address issues such as sexuality and gender roles as well.

The introduction to Moraga's work, *Loving in the War Years* is a poem titled "The Voices of the Fallers." In this piece Moraga establishes the intent of her book. Her poem was in-part crafted with her "High School Classmate" and fellow LGBTQ community member in mind, a friend who had thrown herself off a cliff in Baja California (Moraga 145). One stanza in this piece states "I was born queer with the dream / of falling / the small sack of my body / dropping / off a ledge / suddenly" (Moraga 14-19). The word "dream" suggests that Cleòfilas sees this action as a positive outcome. To the reader, it seems counterintuitive to associate the positive connotations of the word "dream" with the following violent outcomes. The imagery of "falling...dropping / off a ledge" conjures up images of pain, injury, and death (Moraga 15-18). However, later in her piece Cleòfilas makes a surprising admission to the intent of her actions. Cleòfilas speaks directly to Moraga and states "When I fell / from the cliff / ...it was the purest move / I ever made..." (Moraga 105-109). In these several lines the Cleòfilas is assuring Moraga of her intent. How her actions were not selfish or thoughtless. She continues by asking Moraga directly if she "know[s] what it feels like finally / to be up / against nothing?" and continues on to state "Oh it's like flying, Cherríe / I'm flying" (Moraga 117-121).

In the introductory poem "The Voices of the Fallers," the protagonists' conveys that freedom can be found through the challenging of limitations. Similar to Cisneros' work, Moraga's text examines established, cultural borders, but goes beyond gender roles to include sexuality. Her character, in the lines "up / against nothing" has etched out a

place for her to occupy (Moraga 118-119). Gloria Anzaldúa, in her ground breaking text *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* speaks of how “women of color” are often “blocked, immobilized, we can’t move forward, can’t move backwards” (43). Moreover, for the “lesbian of color,” who breaks two cultural “prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality,” rejection from “mother/culture/race” is a constant fear (41-2). Cherrie Moraga’s compilation of poetry and critical essays challenges the borders of culturally sanctioned gender roles; in addition, it defiantly creates a space for sexuality. In Moraga’s introductory poem “The Voice of the Fallers” she is not destroying her character by allowing her to fall from a cliff. Contrary to that she is allowing her character to speak freely about her sexuality and to cross the limitations of gender binaries.

Though each of Moraga’s poems survey the cultural landscape of identity, one poem addresses the borders and cultural limitations of identity explicitly. Her poem “Loving on the Run” starts by questioning the issue of place. Her poem starts with the narrator explaining the physical placement of the protagonist upon first meeting her:

I found you on the street

Hanging out with a bunch of boys

Lean brown boys

You too lean

Talking your girl head off

Like some wizard

Sayin

“I know what that feels like.” (Moraga 1-10)

In this section the narrator asserts that the protagonist is found in a male dominated physical space. The author's coupling of "on the street" with "Hanging out with a bunch of boys" describes how this character is not a casual passerby, but a part of the group dynamic (Moraga 1-2). In placing the reader "on the street" Moraga establishes a symbolic place for her character that continues throughout the poem (Moraga 1). Unlike places such as one's home, where norms and customs are entrenched, the "street" implies movement and forces, a place of set order, yet often in conflict with ordered binaries.

Moraga's choice of an active setting, a setting ordered yet filled with movement and danger, is explained further in the lines of poetry that follow. Her use of the word "lean" in lines three and four are an overt double entendre. The author's omission of punctuation leads the reader to interpret the lines in several different ways. At first, the words "lean brown boys" and "you too lean" is read as a physical description of the groups of "boys" and the protagonist (Moraga 3-4). However, when the narrator qualifies the "lean" of the protagonist by stating how it is "into them / talking your girl head off," she establishes how the protagonist is challenging gender boundaries by "leaning" into a male sphere (Moraga 5-6). The author uses "lean" may work as both a verb and an adverb showing that it is an active motion as well as a description. In doing so she is highlighting active resistance and a push-pull movement in gender boundaries, thus, challenging the "immobilized" status of women of color. Moreover, the use of "lean" as an adverb places the focus on the physical appearance of Moraga's focal character. By taking on a physically male appearance Moraga's character further frustrates gender and sexual identity.

Moving past place and action in the first stanza, the narrator legitimizes the fluidity in which the protagonist moves between gender structures. Among the group of boys the narrator comments on how the protagonist enchants the male onlookers, stating “with your glasses / like some wizard / saying / “I know what that feels like” (Moraga 7-10). Her assigning of the gendered label “...wizard” further validates the status of the protagonist as a being able to cross gender boundaries. In addition, it causes the reader to accept her position in a space occupied by men. As a woman navigating in a male structure the protagonist crosses gender roles easily. With the phrase “I know what that feels like” the narrator highlights how the protagonist has engrafted male, idealized, cultural qualities such as dominance and strength (Moraga 10). In opposition to Gonzales’ poem, Moraga is challenging the cultural representation of subordinate women.

Throughout the text the narrator uses the motif of “family” and “belonging” to emphasize the heteronormative, male dominant system the protagonist navigates. The narrator comments on how “I found you there / you guys hanging out / like family to each other / talking about women...” and later “ They don’t catch on / about you being one / for all your talk about women / likin them / they don’t catch the difference” (Moraga 19). Again, the narrator includes the protagonist in the male gendered labeling; this time with the use of the word “guys.” Throughout the piece the narrators builds on this idea of family, she states “like the body of a dark brother...they believin you / about your allied place on the block” (Moraga 36-41). Though the protagonist is referred to several times as family and ally, the typical, positive associations with these words do not apply.

Though the term family is used repeatedly and the protagonist enjoys an allied status with that of the males on the street, she is not safe within this “family” structure. In an essay titled “We Fight Back with our Families” the Moraga explains that within the Mexican-American culture “The control of women begins through the institution of heterosexuality” and that protecting the family unit is not about “safeguard[ing]” and insulating Mexican-American communities from the dominant, oppressive culture, but about control a woman’s sexuality (Moraga 102). Though the protagonist is included in the male dynamic of the community, it does not signal the culture’s moving past gendered roles. Moreover, the protagonist is described as follows “...they believe in you / about your allied place on the block / about the war going on” (Moraga 40-42). The term war is ambiguous; it is not directly defined in the text. Several possible meanings could include a war with other groups of boys, within a Chicano/a cultural framework, or between the dominant Anglo culture that seeks to economically, politically, and culturally oppress. One learns the true focus of the “war” by the follow-up words the author uses. The narrators describes the protagonist at “operating on a street sense” and talking about a “common enemy” (19). She continues to describe the protagonist honed ability to “...spot danger / before he makes it around the corner / before he scarcely notices you” (19). The author genders the “danger,” using “he” to show that it is a volatile, misogynistic danger. Moving it from an ambiguous threat to a male centered one speaks to the author’s intent with the piece. In Moraga’s essay “We Fight Back with our Families” she asserts that many activist in Mexican-American community, similar to Gonzales’ work, are quick to view ideological white supremacy as a threat to be combated, yet will not recognize the issue of “male supremacy” (Moraga 99). Though



Moraga's character is allowed to move between gender boundaries, it is not with impunity.

Though Moraga focuses on the protagonist's place in the community and social structure, her use of the protagonist's consciousness of the "enemy" shows there is an ongoing battle being waged against women by cultural patriarchy. The protagonist's position, "like family," makes it appear as though she is complacent with the dominant, patriarchal status-quo. However, as the piece progresses one finds a more self-aware protagonist emerges. Near the end of the piece the narrator and the protagonist are engaged in an act of intimacy. The narrator describes the act as:

collecting me  
into your thin arms  
you are woman to me  
and brother to them  
in the same breath  
*you marvel at this* (Moraga 21).

The narrator moves the protagonist from the realm of culturally, dominated heteronormativity, to a space that allows for cross gender motion. The protagonist is no longer part of the culturally imposed dichotomy; she transcends borders and creates a multi-faceted person; A person that is "...woman to me / and brother to them / in the same breath" (21). In Moraga's poem, her focal character navigates the gender roles of both men and women. This transcendence of gender boundaries is expanded on by Gloria Anzaldúa's position on what she terms "Half and Half." Anzaldúa explains:

There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having entry into both worlds. Contrary to some psychiatric tenets, half and halves are not suffering from confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender.

What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be either one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited. (Anzaldúa 41)

Anzaldúa's position is that transcending gender limitations is a remarkable feat. She contradicts the conventional, ignorant position that that transcendence of genders is an unintended psychological dysfunction. She turns that argument around by placing the focus on oppressive cultural mores. Moraga is also pushing back against limitations and "despot duality." Subsequently, the protagonist is privileged with a new perspective, one that encompasses both genders. The narrator states how the protagonist is "seeing [herself] / for the first time / in the body of this sister / like family / like [she] belongs." In these several lines the protagonist is moved into the conflicting role of dominant and oppressed. She is allowed to see herself, simultaneously, as woman and patriarch, as part of two families, belonging to each. Moraga in fact creates a space for what is often "rejected" by cultural mores.

As a brother, sister, warrior, and lover, Moraga's protagonist undergoes a transformation of the self. She is revolutionary in that she navigates male-controlled circles and is in control of her own sexuality. Moraga expounds on the protagonist's new mental insight and resolve in her lines:

under your bruised wing  
your shoulderblade bent  
on bearing alone

seeing yourself

for the *first* time

in the body of her boyhood her passion to survive

female and *uncompromising* (Moraga 96-103)

Moraga's lines conjures up images of the distorted body, one that has been active in fight "to survive." The image of a "bruised wing" and the singular "shoulderblade bent / on bearing alone" cause the reader to consider the struggle of her protagonist (Moraga 96-102). In a contradiction of terms, Moraga juxtaposes her repetition of the word "family" and the protagonist position within the group with the solitude of "bearing alone" (Moraga 98). Though Moraga's protagonist was assumed to be part of the culture and accepted within rigidly defined roles, she was not able to truly "*see*" herself beyond constructed binaries. Moraga states that she is now able to internalize both "the body of her boyhood" and "female *uncompromising*" (Moraga 103).

Unlike the inflexible representation of women in Gonzales' piece, Moraga moves past gender binaries and creates an "*uncompromising*" character; a character that is unafraid to move past gendered spaces and create a new space. Moraga's character is not afraid to display a self in conflict with the culture. Once more, Moraga's character does not remove herself from the dominant cultural construct, instead she moves fluidly throughout "limitations."

Both Moraga and Cisneros share in the revolutionary history of Chicanas. They challenge what it means to be women in Chicano/a culture and forthrightly reject the molds and expectations of the culture, yet remain firmly entrenched in it. In their pieces women are seen, not merely as subordinates or accessories to men, but as multifaceted,

dynamic characters. Recapturing the complexity of women, many of their characters straddle gender boundaries. Indeed, some of the female characters in Cisneros work oppose the crossing of gender boundaries. A generational divide reveals that these characters are opposing themselves and exist only in the confines of patriarchy.

Moraga and Cisneros have created works that capture the spirit of the Chicano Movement. Their characters appropriate the idealized traits that were reserved for men in Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ poem, “I Am Joaquín.” Strength, autonomy, and leadership are all resulting characteristic of their focal characters. Moving past the Chicano Movement, Moraga’s work brought issues of sexual autonomy and sexual orientation to the forefront of community consciousness. Something that remains taboo in many ways. Though women in Chicano/a communities have made some inroads with the people in regards of education and autonomy, patriarch still remains persistent. For upcoming generations the works of Cisneros and Moraga will remain foundational in presenting Chicanas as multidimensional.

## **Conclusion**

The historic subjugation and economic oppression of the Mexican people must not be ignored. Many contemporary issues both in Latin America and among U.S. Chicano/a communities, indeed in all “Hispanic” communities in the U.S., stem from a long history of class divisions, prejudicial policies, systemic injustices, and cultural denigration. An understanding of the acts of resistance that followed this troublesome history would help assuage conflict and misunderstanding between ethnic groups in the U.S. Moreover, it would create a more engaged citizenry dedicated to resisting the mistakes of the past.

The study of literature helps to flesh out simplistic representations and narratives. Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ poem “I Am Joaquín” was the touchstone for a time of revolution change. It helped bring together the Mexican-American people. A people that have suffered from years of discrimination and second class status. It captures the whole of Mexican history and encourages its reader to become revolutionary by becoming strong leaders, economically autonomous, and self-determined. Though it brought a people together in a mutual struggle, it did not represent the women in the community and their struggle to break the bounds of patriarchy and gender roles.

Much like their brave predecessors who challenged institutional oppression, it was left up to the women to become their own self advocates. Women in the Chicano Movement used the tactics of the movement to present their issues to the community: conferences: essays: theatre: and literature: Stemming from this authors Cherríe Moraga and Sandra Cisneros’ wrote works that empowered and inspired. Their characters are strong, autonomous, and multidimensional. These authors moved beyond the early

demands of Chicana feminist by confronting cultural gender roles and taboo subjects such as sexuality and sexual orientation. Their works addressed a tradition of silence for Mexican women and challenged cultural representations of women. By doing so they gave women voice and space in which to engage with the oppressive, dominant culture.

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